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## RECENT DISCUSSION OF UNIVERSITY QUESTIONS

[From Report of President, Meiklejohn, to the Trustees of Amherst College]

"On the educational side, the experiences of the war are so suggestive that one's mind goes whirling about in a chaos when we attempt to fix it upon the future. I do not mean that our fundamental terms of value and method have changed their meanings. They have not been changed, nor will they be by so external an experience as this war has been. But the circumstances of life will undoubtedly be profoundly affected, and to these new circumstances must the liberal college bring all that it has or can find of value and method for the interpreting of the life men lead.

"One very important circumstance for all of us is that in quite amazing number our college teachers have been withdrawn into the centers of government and have taken active and successful part in the management of public affairs. And now we are asking, Will they come back; and if they do, will they be the same men who went out a year or two ago? I think they will come back, but not as they went out. Inevitably there will cling to them an interest in the ways in which men's actual work is done. Together with the scholar's knowledge of the principle, the law, the scheme in general, they will combine the actual sense of contact with the human needs, the opportunities, the obstacles, the ways around or through them. These scholars will have a sense of power they have not had before, perhaps as well as a sense of obligation. How will their coming back affect the colleges?

"I think we must not lose this power nor even the sense of it. Some weaker heads may not sustain the unaccustomed strain of being taken seriously. But my impression is that teachers' heads are fairly tough. At any rate, we may presume that they can stand far greater burdens of respect than we have thus far thrust upon them. Of all the countries in which learning has been set up, there is no one in which the scholar, the college or university teacher, plays so slight a part in shaping public action as in our own. And so I am hoping that these scholars who come back to us will not give up their 'governing' when they return from Washington. They should insist upon a permanent closer fusing of study by

learned men with action by men whose wills determine what the conditions of life shall be. These men who have been in Washington should not just slip apart, each to the little corner whence he came. They should combine into some permanent group to gather up and keep the information, the insight, the knowledge they have gained. They should see to it that from this day on American life is managed, if not by those who study it, at least by those who are willing to learn from those who study it. It may be that as the days of peace come on we shall invite a great assembly of these men to come to Amherst for holding of a conference, where they may bring together the scattered things which they have learned, and may combine their thoughts, not for the furthering of a special point of view, but for the keeping of study and learning effective forces in the affairs of nation and of nations. I wish the trustees of the college would authorize the calling of such a meeting here whenever the time and circumstances should seem to justify it.

"In this connection, there is a problem which concerns immediately college teachers, and only indirectly trustees as well. If teachers are to be in touch with the affairs of public life, their services will inevitably become of value, not only to the state, but also to the private interests and enterprises which taken together make up the state, so far as business is concerned. And here there is danger, the fear of which might lead us to drag each scholar back to his corner and lock him in to keep him safe. If scholars should get to be for 'hire'; if they should go out from their usual work to furnish their knowledge where fees allure them, the day of free, unfettered scholarship would have gone past. Somehow or other it should be arranged that college teachers, going to other public or private service, should do so with little if any private gain. They must not be for hire. I am not ready here to elaborate a scheme for dealing with this situation in all its complications. It seems to me a problem which well might claim continued study from the Association of University Professors. There is, however, a phase of it with which we are immediately concerned. I mean, of course, the general scheme of teachers' salaries. Such salaries have been throughout the country so insufficient that chances to eke them out by taking on an outside service have been too good to lose. But we must make them large enough to take temptation of this sort away.

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"I have said that the making of appointments and promotions is primary in its importance for the college. It is hardly necessary to add that it presents most baffling difficulties. The task of finding men who are intellectual leaders, of so adjusting the conditions of their work as to give free play to their powers, of making judgment as between those who ought to remain here and those who ought not to stay, and of making this judgment effective without too great loss to the persons concerned, of evoking from a group of individuals a closely knit and coherent faculty, this is at once the most important and the most difficult subsidiary task which the college has to do. At present this burden rests upon the Board of Trustees with the general understanding that their actions are taken upon recommendation of the president of the college, upon whom, therefore, rests the immediate responsibility. It has been suggested in the discussions of the Association of University Professors that this responsibility should be shared in some official way by the faculty or by its committees. While one must recognize the presence of many conflicting considerations at this point, and while one cannot fail to be in sympathy with the intent of the suggestion, it seems to me that there is very serious question as to its wisdom. To make the faculty the controlling factor in the college, to recognize that it is in every essential respect the college itself, that has been the underlying motive of every change of organization, every specific action which this report has recorded. And yet I am not sure that it is advisable that the teachers be given official responsibility for the choice of their colleagues. I am sure that such choices must in the long run meet with the approval of the teachers. If they do not, then the officer who is responsible for them will not long hold his power. I am sure that whoever makes appointments must confer often and freely with the teachers whose knowledge of many aspects of the field is more intimate than his own. And yet I am inclined to think that the official participation of teachers would be unfortunate. The reasons for this opinion are somewhat subtle and very difficult to state. For the most part they are summed up or perhaps better concealed in the statement that the teachers are 'interested parties' with respect to the making of appointments. Here it seems to me that the argument which professors have used against trustee domination can be brought with far more telling effect against the professors themselves. I know of no body of men more genuinely disinterested than a college

faculty and yet these men are directly affected by the fixing of salaries, by the making or refusing of promotions, by the bringing in of new men who shall be of higher or lower or equal standing with themselves. In every such decision they are themselves more or less remotely concerned. I do not mean to suggest that their decision with respect to colleagues would, therefore, be affected by explicitly selfish considerations. Just in the same way few people imagine that college trustees are consciously using their positions to further their own selfish ends. What one does fear is the unconscious bias of an 'interested' party. And I may say frankly that in the case of the teachers I should fear far more the influence of personal friendships and of group loyalty than that of conscious or unconscious self-seeking.

"I may, however, be challenged to show evidence of the presence of such bias. If so, then I can only appeal to common knowledge of the well-known fact that college teachers when given the power of choice do not choose good colleagues. There is, I think, under this system, an almost inevitable tendency downwards in quality. On the whole, the teacher tends to choose men to help him, men who are his seconds. There are not many men so constituted that they choose better men than themselves as co-laborers in the same field. And this again is true not because of jealousy, but because in a quite inevitable sense a man's standards are himself and he cannot effectively rise above them.

"In spite of all the argument, however, I am still willing to say that the question seems to me an open one. In the issue of the democratic control of the college, there are many other considerations of which account must be taken. And yet I am inclined to think that our colleges are not ready for complete democracy of organization; that they will not be ready for it until their standards of excellence have been far more securely established than they are at present.

"I am glad to report that within our own faculty organization the custom of regarding one member of a department as its 'head' has been abandoned, except as in certain cases it persists in terms of long-established affection and esteem. There is no doubt that the institution was an evil one in its unjust and unnecessary interference with a proper democracy among teachers. There is no valid reason why one teacher should be allowed to dominate his fellows, to tell what they shall teach and how they shall teach it,

to determine their promotions or the refusal of them. Matters of teaching content and method should for the most part be determined in conference by the teachers concerned, and if they cannot agree, then their differences should be passed upon by the wider group of the faculty in whose hands are the teaching policies of the college as a whole.

“In this connection I am glad to record also that the notion of the ‘department’ is being heavily shaken and is losing its power. At least in a faculty so small as ours, the individual teacher is the best unit of organization, and if our work be properly unified there is no adequate reason why each man’s work should not be conceived and carried on with explicit reference to the teaching of the college as a whole.”